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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media led with reports that PM Sharon and PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) are expected to issue separate statements at today's Sharm el-Sheikh summit to put an end to over four years of violence. The major newspapers' front pages are adorned in the style befitting festive occasions. Banners in Yediot: "New Hope," Maariv: "Summit of Hope," and Hatzofe: "Summit of Declarations." Maariv highlighted Israel's hope that the peace declarations would lead to actions.

All media quoted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as saying at the close of her visit in the region that Lt. Gen. William E. (Kip) Ward (whom a Maariv headline dubs a "champion in the struggle against terror, and a rookie in the Middle East") has been appointed the United States' security coordinator, but not political arbitrator, in the region, in which capacity he will assist the rehabilitation of the Palestinian security services, encourage greater Israeli-Palestinian security coordination, and, if necessary, head trilateral security coordination. Ward will also remain in contact with Egypt and Jordan, both of which will be involved in Israeli-Palestinian security arrangements. Rice said that Ward's mandate was security-related because progress on security is a precondition for progress in other areas. Ha'aretz notes that Israeli officials were pleased both by the choice of Ward and by his limited mandate -- focused on security only, and with emphasis on the Palestinian side.

Ha'aretz reported that Secretary Rice delivered invitations to both Sharon and Abbas during her visit in the region, and on Monday expressed confidence that the Sharm el-Sheikh summit would succeed. Ha'aretz quoted President Bush as saying Monday that he hopes to meet with the new Palestinian leadership in the White House this spring to discuss ways of furthering Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Bush praised Abbas, who he said received an electoral mandate from many Palestinians and enjoyed his public's confidence.

Leading media (principally Ha'aretz) reported that on Monday, the U.S. administration released details of the increased aid that President Bush promised the PA last week. The White House has asked Congress to release USD 40 million immediately. Of this, USD 8 million will be earmarked for assistance to the private sector, USD 3 million for health care, and USD 13 million for improving the PA's water infrastructure; the remainder will be devoted to higher education, community services and job creation. The White House is also requesting USD 200 million for renovating houses in Gaza, rehabilitating the Palestinian economy, facilitating cargo transfers between Israel and the PA and improving healthcare and welfare. The newspaper says that Bush also plans to ask Congress for USD 150 million for the PA in 2006.

Hatzofe reported that at the security talks with the Palestinians, Israel rejected a Palestinian request to resume the "safe passage" procedure between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The newspaper reported that the GOI is inclined to return VIP passes to senior Palestinians, which Israel confiscated around four years ago.

Ha'aretz reported that Egypt is offering to position 3,000-3,500 additional policemen at its border with the Gaza Strip in order to prevent arms smuggling. The newspaper cited Israel's suspicious attitude regarding the proposal. Hatzofe reported that on Wednesday, the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee will discuss anti-Semitic incitement in Egypt.

Ha'aretz reported that the government plans to employ a parliamentary maneuver to get the disengagement bill through the Knesset Finance Committee this week. All media reported that Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, spiritual leader of the Lithuanian stream of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, on Monday instructed Degel Hatorah Knesset members within the United Torah Judaism party to vote in favor of holding a referendum on the disengagement plan. Maariv reported that an associate of Rabbi Elyashiv hinted that he only wanted to avoid a situation in which a UTJ representative would determine the vote at the Finance Committee. However, Ha'aretz noted that there is still no Knesset majority for passing the necessary legislation.

Ha'aretz quoted a senior Israeli security official as saying Monday that Israel will evacuate settlement outposts in the West Bank only after implementation of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank.

Jerusalem Post quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, following a meeting with Secretary Rice on Monday, as saying that a military strike against nuclear targets was not on the agenda. Mofaz said: "I think we see eye-to-eye [with the U.S.] that the diplomatic path is the correct one at this time. We did not speak of other options."

Leading media reported that far-right militants failed to get elected at Monday's elections for the Likud secretariat, which is considered the party's most

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influential body.

A Yediot/Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute) poll:
-"What is your position on the disengagement plan?"
Fairly positive: 21 percent; absolutely positive: 48 percent; absolutely opposed: 18 percent; somewhat opposed: 9 percent.
-"Do you think Palestinian prisoners, including those who murdered Israelis (those with 'blood on their hands'), should be released?" Those 'with blood on their hands' may be released, but only if they are old or sick: 21 percent; prisoners yes, but not those 'with blood on their hands': 46 percent; they should not be released at all: 31 percent.
-"Is Israel headed for a period of security calm? Are you optimistic?" Rather optimistic: 48 percent; very optimistic 13 percent; very pessimistic: 27 percent; rather pessimistic: 23 percent.
-"Abu Mazen proclaims that he intends to bring about a halt to the terrorist attacks. Do you believe him?" Tend to believe him 36 percent; believe him 24 percent; don't believe him 27 percent; tend not to believe him 10 percent.
-"Should a referendum be held on the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and northernmost part of the West Bank?" Think there is a need: 20 percent; certain there is a need: 35 percent; certain there is no need: 27 percent; think there is no need: 16 percent.

Erratum: In the Feb. 7 Media Reaction report, the findings of the Tel Aviv University's Peace Index poll conducted among Israeli Jews on January 31-February 1 should have read:
-77 percent support negotiations with the Palestinians; 51 percent (not 31 percent) believe they will lead to peace in the next few years.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Israel

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and the Palestinian Authority brought with it a renewal of U.S. involvement in the effort to solve the conflict, after a long period in which it was absent from the region."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the

editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Are the two peoples, intertwined in a bloody 100-year conflict, capable of starting a process toward an agreement without ... a 'leap of faith'?" Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot: "Everything that is happening and will happen in the months ahead between Israel and the Palestinians, between Israel and the Americans, between Israel and the world, is dependent on Ariel Sharon."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "This [summit] will be a light, distilled sample of peace. One moment of sanity. A small promo of normality."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Showering Abbas with 'help' will have the opposite of the intended effect if such help is not made conditional on concrete results."

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in Maariv: "The question is whether the Israelis and the Palestinians are going to Sharm el-Sheikh to bury their differences or only to build up their strength for the next round of violence."

Nationalist columnist Emuna Elon wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "The only problem is that Palestinian logic remains different from ours, and so on and so forth until we wise up."

Block Quotes:

I. "Rice Adopts the Disengagement"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (February 8): "U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority brought with it a renewal of U.S. involvement in the effort to solve the conflict, after a long period in which it was absent from the region.... The U.S. will avoid mediation at this point, but will help find solutions for problems that arise. Rice also made clear the determined support of the U.S. for the disengagement plan.... In her talks with the political echelon in Jerusalem, Rice emphasized the importance of sticking to the timetable set for the disengagement and called for it not to be delayed.... Rice's statements are an important message to the Israeli public and political arena. In U.S. eyes, the disengagement plan is not an internal Israeli affair but a far-reaching international commitment by the government that bears within it a chance for a historic change in the history of the region, and for relations between Israel and the Arabs. This opportunity must not be missed.... Sending Lt. Gen. William Ward to the region as a security coordinator to accompany the Palestinian security reforms and monitor the activities of both sides is proper and appropriate. One of the lessons of the Oslo process and the Intifada was the need for a critical eye, which could demand of the Israelis and Palestinians that they keep their promises. At Israel's request, the envoy's mandate will focus on security arrangements in this current prologue period before the start of the road map. One can expect that the monitoring mechanisms will expand in the future, but for now the Americans preferred to accede to the Israeli request to help Sharon successfully accomplish the disengagement."

II. "A Leap of Faith"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 8): "Ever since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit was declared, the leaderships in Jerusalem and in Ramallah have been careful to paint it in shades of gray. Israel depicts it as a ceremony that it has practically been forced into, without the American boss.... Israelis and Palestinians have remained, even in the days filled with the greatest hope, suspicious of each other.... But at this time, as the leaders meet, the question if there is any other way still hovers in the air. Are the two peoples, intertwined in a bloody 100-year conflict, capable of starting a process toward an agreement without such a 'leap of faith'?.... Sharon will not give a moving speech today, like those that Yitzhak Rabin would make. The Palestinian leader will not talk about a 'peace of the brave.' Sharon and Abu Mazen are not great orators, who can move people with their vision. Their peoples, whose wounds are still bleeding, do not want to hear about a tomorrow in which the army removes its uniform and our hearts stand at attention [words from a Hebrew song]. But even so, it is still not just another day."

And despite this unwillingness, it is very unlikely if it will ever be possible to bridge the abyss in one leap, high above the lack of trust."

III. "Good-Bye Intifada, Good Morning Conflict"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of Yediot Aharonot (February 8): "The four leaders who will pose for a joint picture in Sharm el-Sheikh today will convey, by the fact of their presence there, the following message: the old Intifada, the Intifada of terror, is over. The new era will be a lot more complex. It will include unilateral steps along with the signs of negotiations and along with outbursts of violence and terror.... Sharon does not intend to bring gifts to Sharm el-Sheikh. He will bring the news of the release of 900 prisoners that was approved by the security cabinet, and will suffice with that. From the Palestinians' perspective, this is a disappointment. The gap between Sharon and Abu Mazen is not just over the size of the gestures. It applies to almost every issue on the agenda. The battlefield is the U.S. administration, international public opinion and public opinion in Israel. The big question is whether it will be possible to wage this battle over time without falling into the trap of violence. There are a number of positive signs on the ground. First, the drastic drop in terror. Even if this is temporary, it allows both sides to gather strength.... The absence of [Israeli] ministers at Sharm el-Sheikh highlights just how much disengagement, and everything that is happening and will happen in the months ahead between Israel and the Palestinians, between Israel and the Americans, between Israel and the world, is dependent on Ariel Sharon. This is an enormous burden. He prefers to bear it alone."

IV. "In Front of Everyone"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (February 8): "This [summit] will be a light, distilled sample of peace. One moment of sanity. A small promo of normality. It is not yet clear whether Abu Mazen is capable of doing something real against Hamas.... It is not clear whether Abu Mazen has a chance, but what is clear that positive energy is building up from people in all quarters who want a little peace and quiet. Today Sharon will try to give it a chance, even though he is skeptical, apprehensive, suspicious and quick-tempered. A huge wave of expectations is rising up in front of him. Sharon will be happy to splash about in it, to quench his thirst. The real test will begin on the morning after, when he will have to match reality [with the expectations], to coordinate the intentions, to overcome the obstacles and cross the canals. All that still lies ahead of us.... The road will still be hard. But it too has to begin with one small step."

V. "How This Summit Could Be Different"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (February 8): "Why are we asked to believe this time will be different? Two reasons, presumably: the death of Yasser Arafat and general Palestinian exhaustion. These fundamental factors should indeed provide some basis to build something new. Yet there are some lessons from past hopeful moments that should be learned to help ensure that this one is not squandered.... It is not enough to let the terrorists take a break, while leaving intact the moral and physical infrastructure that supports them.... Terrorists will not be stopped by throwing money at the Palestinian Authority, or by 'helping Abu Mazen' by releasing prisoners.... This time, as in the past, Israel will doubtless release prisoners, pull back its forces, stop running after wanted terrorists, release funds, remove checkpoints and welcome more Palestinian workers. But if this time is to be different, the Palestinian claim that Israel has not done enough of all these things should not be accepted as an excuse for the PA not doing what it can and must do. Showering Abbas with 'help' will have the opposite of the intended effect if such help is not made conditional on concrete results."

VI. "Enough Blood Has Been Shed"

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in Maariv (February 8): "If all the hopes of the past few days are realized in full, and if there is no last-minute hitch, it will happen today: the two sides will announce a ceasefire. This time, it is to be hoped, it will be genuine and durable.... But after such a long conflict, the mutual distrust between the two sides still poses a serious problem. This will not

be solved at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit by a mere declaration that the violence is over. In return for the things which Israel is demanding, the Palestinians are demanding the ultimate gesture -- release of murderers. Every time the issue is raised, the Palestinians cite what happened in Northern Ireland and South Africa, to show that the policy contributes to genuine reconciliation. But the question is whether the Israelis and the Palestinians are going to Sharm el-Sheikh to bury their differences or only to build up their strength for the next round of violence."

VII. "And So On and So Forth Until We Wise Up"

Nationalist columnist Emuna Elon wrote in Yediot Aharonot (February 8): "To evaluate whether something good is indeed about to happen this time, we must examine why nothing good came out of the previous 'new eras,' and the answer, 'Yasser Arafat,' is not enough. Arafat did not destroy the Israeli dreams of peace on his own, and his death did not disarm the battalions of terror who control Judea, Samaria and Gaza [i.e. the territories]. Sharon's withdrawal from Gush Katif and from northern Samaria [i.e. the northernmost part of the West Bank] is also not enough: the present Intifada in fact broke out, let us not forget, when Ehud Barak was about to withdraw from much more territory.... Western logic led to the conception of 'land for peace' and to the vision of a Palestinian state on both sides of Israel (in Judea and Samaria and in Gaza). Today Israeli logic contends that terror will stop if we only stop annoying the Palestinians and getting them to hit back at us, if we only release more murderers, if we just stop 'occupying' our land. The only problem is that Palestinian logic remains different from ours, and so on and so forth until we wise up."

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